



# Fruitland Police Department

208 S. Division St.  
Fruitland, Md. 21826  
410-548-2803 – 410-548-2804  
Fax 410-548-2808

Krah J. Plunkert  
Chief of Police

## **Richard Tanner Jones, 911 Police Communications Supervisor Testimony**

### **SB 1034 - 9–1–1 Specialist Recruitment and Retention Workgroup**

#### **Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee**

Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Richard Tanner Jones, and I am a 911 Specialist Supervisor. I am here in support of SB 1034.

The life and job of a 911 Specialist is often chaotic, stressful, and mentally taxing, but I was born to do this job, and I cannot imagine doing anything else. Countless hours of training, rotating shifts, missed family functions, birthdays, holidays, etc. If you ask any 911 Specialist, they will tell you we do not do this job to get rich. We do it because we love it. At 18 years old, I found a job that I was decent at with good benefits and was able to make retirement contributions. I am fortunate to not have many calls that “haunt” me, others however are not as lucky. 911 Specialists spend their career talking to people, often on the worst day of their lives. And when that call is over, another phone line rings and is answered. These calls can take a toll on you over the years, and some things you cannot unhear.

In any career, retirement is the goal. You go to work, you do your best, and at the end of your years of service, you retire. As a 911 Specialist under the current retirement, you will likely have to seek employment either in another field altogether or like many retired dispatchers that I know, seek employment with another agency doing the same thing just to make ends meet.

Even though I will have my 30 years of service in a profession that I love at the age of 48, I will not receive my full benefits. I will have to work an additional 12 years and retire at the age of 60 to receive my full retirement benefits. Instead of working 30 years and retiring, I will have to work 42 years. I love my job, but this problem is a major recruitment and retention issue.

Recruitment and retention for 911 Specialists is extremely difficult for many reasons: the hiring process of vetting candidates, the length of training, the nature of the calls we take, scheduling, etc. We also receive a lower end of the pay scale and a significantly lower retirement percentage compared to our colleagues in Police/Fire/EMT. 911 Specialists work the same shifts, the same calls, and the same holidays but are not given the same benefits as our coworkers. It can and does make many feel like their job is not as valued as other jobs in public safety.

Just in the Fruitland Police Department, in a three-month period two Communications personnel left. This caused an extreme hardship on the Communications Division with personnel covering shifts, time off requests that had already been put in, and it significantly impacted overall mental wellbeing due to exhaustion, but my team rallied, and we came out on top. We are now fully staffed, and my people are happy. We are fortunate to work for the department that we do as our Communications personnel are appreciated by the department and the city. Unfortunately, many centers do not have that same level of appreciation and that is another factor that causes good employees to leave. It is so difficult to keep

good, dedicated employees in this profession. We need to substantially improve the quality of life for our retirees and give some incentive for people to even apply in the first place. I strongly ask you to pass Senate Bill 1034.